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# When group victimhood and personal experiences of conflict collide: Building citizenship from adversity

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## 1. Background

In Northern Ireland (NI) today, the majority of children and young people were born in the post-Good Friday Agreement era, and most do not have direct experience of the major civil unrest and violence of the Troubles. However, many are from families and communities that were deeply impacted by the conflict (and continue to experience sectarian violence). Utilising the insights of **Altruism Born of Suffering** (Staub & Vollhardt, 2008), which offers an explanation for why youth who have experienced adversity may engage in helping behaviours, and given the evidence that an ‘**inclusive victim consciousness**’ can, under some conditions, promote positive intergroup relations (Vollhardt, 2015) (while ‘**competitive victimhood**’ can predict negative relations (Noor et al, 2008)), this study investigated the relationships between self-reported adversity (impact of the conflict), perceived group victimhood in NI, and civic engagement & prosocial behaviour in the wider community.

## 2. Study Design

This cross-sectional study used data from the **first time-point of a longitudinal evaluation of the EU’s PEACE IV: Children and Young People programme in NI** collected between February and May 2018. Only NI residents and those who reported being from a Catholic or Protestant community background were included in the analysis (valid n=312, age 14-24). Participants completed an online survey of validated measures. Data were subject to **moderation analyses** using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (see Hayes, 2017).

## 3. Results (i)

Initial Independent samples T-Tests revealed that while there was no significant difference between Catholics and Protestants in regard to the strength of their community identification, Protestants had a significantly lower mean score for perceived group victimhood than Catholics ( $t=-4.87$ ,  $df=247$ ,  $p<.001$ ). When recoded in a crosstab (see Table 1; Cramer’s  $V = .272$ ,  $p<.001$ ), it became clear that the variables of perceived group victimhood and community background could act as important moderators in the relationship between experience (impact on self) of the conflict and positive civic attitudes and behaviours.

Table 1: Crosstab of Community Background by perceived group victimhood categories	Protestant community	Catholic community	Overall sample
Other community more victimised	25.3%	8.7%	15.3%
No community more victimised	40.4%	33.3%	36.1%
Own community more victimised	34.3%	58.0%	48.6%

### References

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## 3. Results (ii)

(a) Model 1 revealed that **perceived victimhood moderated the link between impact of conflict and prosocial behaviour** ( $b=.002$ ); however, the interaction was only approaching significance ( $p=.101$ )

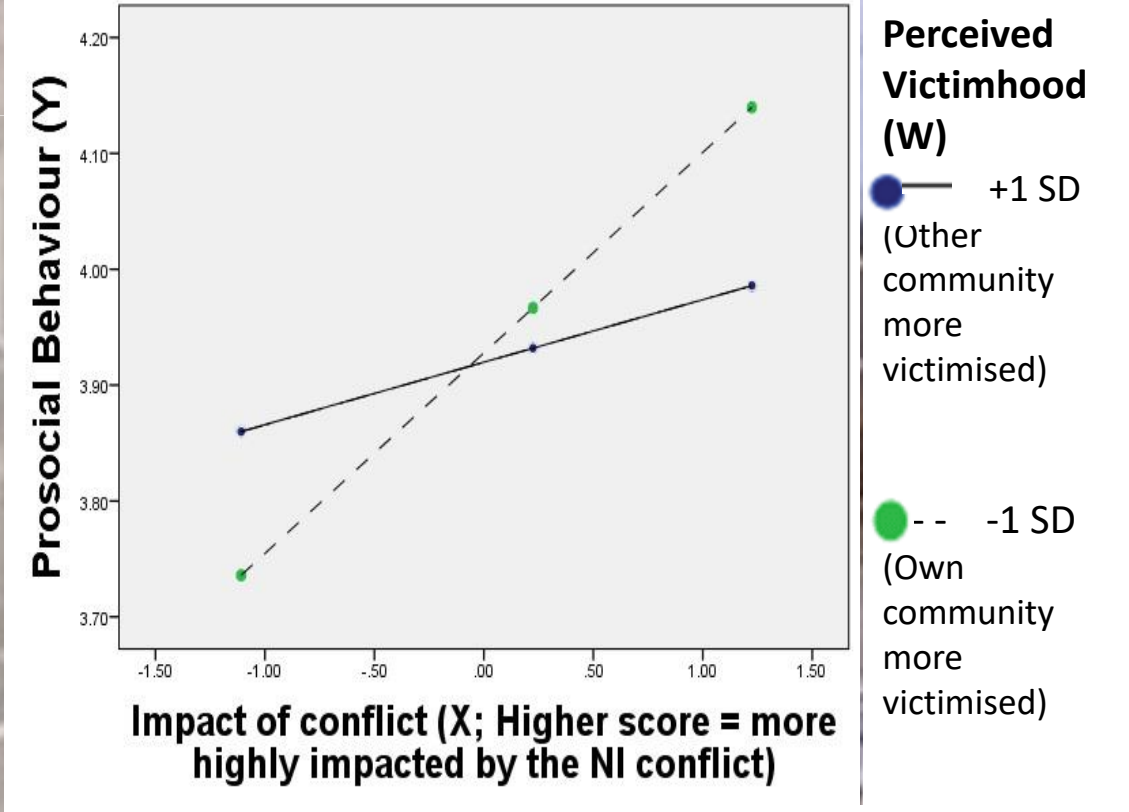


Figure 1. Model 1: The moderation of the effect of Impact of conflict (X) on prosocial behaviours (Y) by perceived victimhood (W)

(b) A second model revealed that **community background (either Catholic or Protestant) moderated the influence that perceived group victimhood had on civic engagement** ( $b=.077$ ). Catholics who believed the other community was more victimised and Protestants who believed their own community was more victimised had almost the same scores for civic engagement. However, as in Model 1, this was only approaching significance ( $p=.107$ ).

(c) A third model, using **perceived victimhood as a moderator, revealed that the path between in-group identification strength and prosocial behaviour was stronger for those who perceived lower in-group victimisation compared to those who perceived**

**higher in-group victimisation** ( $b=.003$ ,  $p=.045$ ). This effect held even when controlling for different types of adversity, such as the level of impact of the conflict on self, and levels of community and income deprivation.

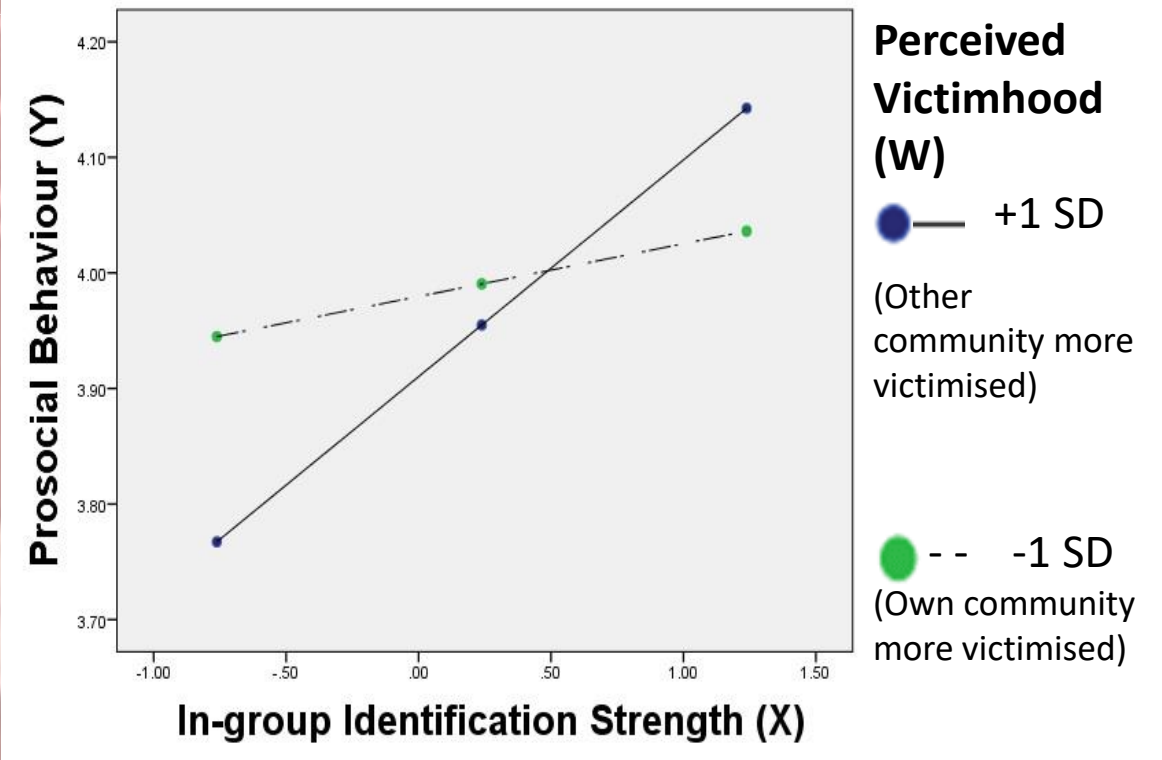


Figure 2. The moderation of the effect of community identification strength (X) on prosocial behaviour (Y) by perceived victimhood (W)

## 4. Conclusions

The results add some support to ABS and provide useful observations for the extension of work on the influence of group victimhood beliefs on prosocial behaviours in post-conflict societies. Model 3 in particular indicates it is perhaps psychologically ‘easier’ for people with strong in-group identification to act in prosocial ways if they don’t believe their community suffered as much as the other community during the conflict. This finding adds to Taylor and Hanna’s (2018) work on ABS in Northern Ireland (who found the path from empathy to helping behaviour was moderated by ingroup/outgroup status of the victim of harm) and to Cohrs, McNeill and Vollhardt’s (2015) work with a sample from NI, which found that *type* of inclusive victimhood (whether ‘universal’ or ‘selective’) moderated the relationship between inclusive victimhood beliefs and readiness for reconciliation. As data are from the first time-point in a longitudinal evaluation, the effects will be tested again to account for the time the young people from the sample spend attending the peacebuilding youth work programmes they are enrolled in.